

The Inspiration of “Universal Harmoniousness” Thoughts for the Contemporary Chinese Diplomacy

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Keywords: Traditional Culture; Universal Harmoniousness; Harmonious Diplomacy.

Abstract. “Universal harmoniousness” is an important feature of Chinese traditional culture, and is the core content of China ancient foreign policies. Since the establishment of China, Chinese government has inherited and developed the traditional concept of Chinese diplomacy and has put forward the great strategy of “harmonious diplomacy”, which demonstrated the Chinese wisdom of foreign policies in the new era and expressed the desire to build, together with other nations, a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity.

Foreword

“Universal harmoniousness” is an important feature of China traditional culture, and also the precious heritage of Confucian culture. The unified dynasties in the feudal societies of ancient China never have any past records of putting surrounding small countries into their colonies, but they did set up a special harmonious diplomatic relationship of trade, called “tribute”. In ancient China, predatory wars rarely launched against foreign countries, active-attacking aggressive wars were even fewer, defense policy were mostly taken against foreign invasions, even if attacks were taken, they were taken as a means of defense, rather than plundering purpose. After the war, the victor would make their triumphant return, and usually would award those surrendered. This use of moral education as foreign policy to “harmonize the universe” is always the spirit and tradition of ancient China opposing aggressive wars, advocating peace and friendship. To review and examine the “harmony” thought of Confucian culture will undoubtedly play an important role in the comprehensive understanding of China’s diplomatic policy in the new era, in playing a positive role of a responsible great power, and in achieving the peaceful development of the Chinese nation.

The Theoretical Origin of the Ancient “Harmony” Thought

The ancient China’s “harmony” thought reflects an ingrained Chinese culture; its core content is the “benevolence”, “righteousness”, and “harmoniousness”. The ideas of “benevolent government”, “value just above material gains” and “unification of man and nature” left China no soil of thinking of aggressive and unjust wars and formed a tradition of handling foreign relations in a peaceful way.

Mr. Xu Fuguan, the second generation of the new Confucianism master, pointed that the result of the integration of humanity and fate or providence, or the perfection of human development is “benevolence”, and Confucius “benevolence” theory established the basic character of Chinese mainstream culture. Yan Yuan in The Analects of Confucius records: “Fan Chi asked about benevolence. The Master said, ‘It is to love all men.’” “Benevolence” puts forward requirements on people’s morality, namely, respect for others, considering others in one’s own place. Studying in The Analects of Confucius records: “Filial piety and fraternal submission! - are they not the root of all benevolent actions?” Studying in The Analects of Confucius records: “A youth, when at home, should be filial, and, abroad, respectful to his elders. He should be earnest and truthful. He should overflow in love to all, and cultivate the friendship of the good.” Chin Hsin (part one) in Mencius records: “The superior man is lovingly disposed to people generally, and kind to creatures.”

“Benevolence” is the cornerstone of Confucianism; and the core principle of diplomacy in Confucian thought. It requires that the spirit of benevolence is extended to the universe, benefitting others and benefitting all things, from oneself to the others and from people to the universe. The basic way of benevolence is emphasized as that “wishing to be established himself, seeks also to establish others; wishing to be enlarged himself, seeks also to enlarge others.” and that “what you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.” In the Confucians view, to make aggressive war is tantamount to bandits’ behavior, and casualties thus caused are completely contrary to the benevolence thought.

The argument on righteousness and benefit is one of the basic Confucian theoretical issues. The Confucianism takes “righteousness” as the main criteria for behavior evaluation. Yang Huo in *The Analects of Confucius* records: “The superior man holds righteousness to be of highest importance.” On the relationship between righteousness and benefit, the Confucianism put “righteousness” in the first place. Kao Tzu (part one) in *Mencius* records: “I like life, and I also like righteousness. If I cannot keep the two together, I will let life go, and choose righteousness.” The Confucianism takes “righteousness” as the ultimate value goal, but not completely ignores the “benefit”. Xian asked in *The Analects of Confucius* records: “He takes when it is consistent with righteousness to do so, and so men do not get tired of his taking.” “Righteousness” is one of the important Confucian values. The basic view of Confucius foreign policy includes overrating public benefit, underrating private benefit, putting righteousness before benefit, considering righteousness at the sight of benefit, balancing righteousness and benefit, and taking benefit by way of righteousness. To neutralize conflicts in foreign affairs, the Confucianism proposes to put benevolence and righteousness before benefit. As the saying goes, the benevolent have no enemy. The fundamental way to resolve international conflicts is the way of benevolence and righteousness.

“Harmoniousness” is a valuable heritage of China traditional culture, which has a very rich connotation. “Pacifism” is the primary characteristics of Confucian “harmoniousness” thought. Studying in *The Analects of Confucius* records: “In practicing the rules of propriety, a natural ease is to be prized. In the ways prescribed by the ancient kings, this is the excellent quality, and in things small and great we follow them.” “To be affable, but not adulatory” is the important connotation of Confucian “harmoniousness” thought. Xian asked in *The Analects of Confucius* records: “The superior man is affable, but not adulatory; the mean man is adulatory, but not affable.” The Confucianism does not advocate dispute and conflict with others. But when facing provocation from other people or other country, the use of force, the war sanctified by ethic, does not rule out. Zilu in *The Analects of Confucius* records: “To lead an uninstructed people to war is to throw them away.” The Confucianism takes “harmoniousness” as the highest realm of handling diplomatic relations. This is the “Pacifism” of generosity, moderation, virtue and benevolent government. Moreover, this is “To be affable, but not adulatory” of mutual tolerance and respecting for differences. The tradition is ingrained of peacefully handling foreign affair, emphasizing the importance of moral cultivation, and opposing force contention. It becomes the final destination of ancient Chinese diplomacy to develop harmoniously by way of balanced and multiline symbiosis.

The Choice and Practice of Harmonious Foreign Policy in Contemporary China

The founding of the PRC in 1949 established a new era in the Chinese history. The principles of foreign policy in new China are to protect national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, to support continuous peace and the friendly cooperation among all nations, to oppose the imperialist policies of aggression and war. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, put forward by Zhou Enlai, are: “mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.” The independent peaceful foreign policy and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence give contemporary Chinese diplomacy distinctive characteristics of peace as the basic proposition.

After the Third Plenary Session of the eleventh CPC in 1978, along with the proposal to have

economic construction as the central strategy and the change of the national pattern, a new diplomatic thinking has been formed in China. Deng Xiaoping put forward “one country, two systems” theory, advocated “putting aside disputes, common development” principle on international territorial disputes. The “peace and development” he proposed has become the world’s two major themes. “One country two systems” not only embodies the respect for individual differences, but also with one-China as the starting point, ensures the realization of the whole nation’s reunification. “Putting aside disputes” allows “differences” to a certain extent, namely the existence of diversities. “Joint exploitation” is to ease potential conflicts of different things, and to achieve win-win situation for peaceful coexistence. “Peace and development” has become the basic goal of Chinese foreign policy.

In 1990s, the drastic changes in Eastern Europe, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the end of the cold war pattern brought about a significant impact to the international environment that China faced. Jiang Zemin pointed out, “We will continue to cement our friendly ties with our neighbors and persist in building a good-neighborly relationship and partnership with them. We will step up regional cooperation and bring our exchanges and cooperation with our surrounding countries to a new height.” Position paper on the new security concept that Chinese submitted to the ASEAN forum suggested that the core of the new security concept should be mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, and collaboration. On the UN millennium summit, Jiang Zemin emphasized that “the world is rich and colorful”, “and the diversity need to be fully respected of different nations, different religions and different cultures. World development vitality lies in the diversity’s coexistence.” The diplomatic thinking of “building a good-neighborly relationship and partnership”, the new security concept, and the diversity of the world comprehensively expounded the profound connotation of promoting the construction of the peaceful and prosperous world, and took on a vivid color of “seeking unity and harmony”, “seeking partners”, and “all-round participation”. In twenty-first Century, the world is in the new stage of economic turmoil, system reform, and structure adjustment. Peace and development are still the themes of the times. In the report of the 17th CPC Congress, Hu Jintao pointed out that “We maintain that the people of all countries should join hands and strive to build a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity.” “Harmonious world” thought is a great innovation of contemporary Chinese diplomatic theory. Chinese diplomatic philosophy no longer stayed in the thinking orientation of Confucian thought of benevolence and righteousness, to be affable but not adulatory, and peaceful diplomacy. At the same time of promoting scientific outlook and building up a harmonious society at home, it called out to the outside for co-constructing a harmonious world. China’s principled stance on the international situation and global governance is expressed, i.e. adhering to multilateralism, achieving common security, upholding mutually beneficial cooperation, realizing common prosperity, adhering to the spirit of tolerance, and co-constructing a harmonious world.

Reviewing the brilliant achievements of more than 60 years’ China diplomacy, new China has made significant contributions for safeguarding national sovereignty, national security and national development interests, and for promoting peace, development, and cooperation in the world. China has worked closely with other countries in handling international disputes in a responsible attitude. At the same time, China has vigorously carried out her foreign diplomacy in economic, cultural, and public areas, and has achieved fruitful results. Friendly cooperation with the rest of the world has been comprehensively promoted. The countries maintaining diplomatic ties with China have been increased from 18 in early PRC to 171, and a gratifying situation of “we have friends all over the world” has been formed. While affirming the idea of “harmonious world” with “enduring peace and common prosperity” as the core, the 18th CPC National Congress put forward the new concept of “new type of relations with other major countries” and “China’s development will bring more benefits to the neighbors”, and suggested forward-looking diplomatic thought of “promoting equality, mutual trust, inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutually beneficial cooperation in international relations”. Nevertheless, as a global power, China’s foreign policy is still faced with daunting

challenges, shouldering heavy responsibilities and a long way ahead to go.

Conclusion

There are many things in common between the theory of “harmonious world” and the theory of “global governance” which is popular in the world and aims at the management of the global political affairs. Both are rooted in the concerns of common human destiny, oppose unilateralism and hegemonism, claim to solve the common problem of all countries through international cooperation, oppose to “Pax American” and advocate the strengthening of the role of the United Nations, and are committed to the establishment of a new international political and economic order. “Harmonious world” thought mainly shows China government’s principled stance on the international situation and global governance, and embodies China’s global strategy in the early twenty-first Century. The global strategy founded on the concept of “harmonious world” is known as the Chinese “harmonious diplomacy”.

China is not only the advocator but also a practitioner of “harmonious diplomacy”. Taking sovereign states and international organizations as the main body, “harmonious diplomacy” abides the UN Charter and the resolutions of the United Nations, and dedicates to promoting the common interests of mankind, in order to achieve lasting peace and harmonious prosperity in the whole world. At the same time, “harmonious diplomacy” pays special attention to regional and global security, international cooperation, basic human rights, the global ecology, global risk and transnational crimes, and its main strategy can be summarized as dialogue and consultation, harmony and win-win solution, and seeking common ground while reserving differences, tolerance and openness. “Universal harmoniousness” diplomatic thoughts can theoretically explain China’s harmonious foreign policy, and also contribute to the western world for the recognition of Chinese diplomatic idea. The core value of the “benevolence”, “righteousness”, and “harmoniousness” is moving from the periphery to the centre of the world value system. It will become an important part of international mainstream viewpoint of values after a certain period of historical process. China, in carrying out “harmonious diplomacy”, should strengthen the consciousness and enhance self-confidence of the diplomatic theory. This will make a significant contribution to the advancement of human civilization and progress, to the promotion of all people’s well-being, and to the construction of a harmonious world with lasting peace and common prosperity.

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